

SAW 2019

Second edition

SOFIA ART WEEK

S A W

Background

After its first launch in June 2017, initiated by two independent art spaces in Sofia -Swimming Pool and Æther, Sofia Art Week began as a small event of an extended weekend under the umbrella of a common theme –

Domus Aurea.

Artists: Sevda Semer, Simeon Simeonov, Voin de Voin
Curated by Pavlina Krasteva and Voin de Voin.
Swimming pool – Show curated by Viktoria Draganova and Pavel Naydenov.

The exhibition space was dedicated to the music of Ivan Spasov – composer and conductor with principal contribution to Bulgarian avant-garde music.

The Domus Aurea, let us recall, is that sumptuous patrician villa which Emperor Nero built in the Rome of the first century CE, with the aim to utterly impress his contemporaries. How could one subjugate the Roman people? How could one use an example of extreme splendor to make his omnipotence known?

Architecture is often closely married to political power and become literal metaphors, and procedures of display. Their objective is not at all to accommodate the quotidian, but to represent the grandeur transformed for the occasion into a public spectacle.

Domus Aurea remains one of the most amazing examples in history of this game of symbolic deception and the display of hegemony in a fantastical light. Outsized proportions, walls with gold leaf coverage, richly colored ceilings and frescoes of master painters, abundant fountains and flowered patios galore, etc.

The notion of imperial power – possessed by the only one, who is also worshiped as a deity, the Emperor, the Caesar – has to be resplendent, to impose itself without a need for justification.

Fall 2017 in Sofia.

Times have changed. Democracy has long ago taken its course reshuffling the cards of power. People have succeeded emperors; division of rights, property and sensitivity has succeeded absolute power over culture among all other things. The sacred body of the king (his « double body », as Kantorowicz wrote, the real body, the divine body) has deserted power, leaving space for our multiple bodies, those of ordinary individuals, the soci, the « associates », whose brotherly political union makes and builds democracy. Associated in often tenuous links, to run political affairs, we also experience together the cultural and aesthetic reality in which we live. If we don't like it we don't send an imploring delegation to the Emperor. Rather, we change it by ourselves.

Art, the artistic question in its totality: we have our say; this « total social fact » (M. Mauss) is a property of the citizens, our treasury, our consciences' gold. Democracy has logically led to a regime of chronic cultural instability: everything incessantly changes. Because we constantly change. Tastes and colors rather than fixed once and for all, float at the whim of fashions, engagements, obsessions and circumstances. Such a difficult period revives engaged art willing to fight, while calmer periods are propitious to an art of tender and conciliatory pleasure.

But what is the situation today at the beginning of autumn in Sofia, Bulgaria? A wish for stability in aesthetics or, on the contrary, a desire to overthrow, to question, to revolutionize forms, desires and concepts?

These are not peaceful times, indeed. Ecological challenges, demographic pressure, fratricidal wars near by, migrants wandering about without any help, economic uncertainty strain the social fabric. And this is without taking into account the moral crisis, the collapse of metaphysics and metaphysics of morals, our gradual shift from a vertical society where God plays her part, to the appearance of an ever more horizontal, non-hierarchical society where the «ego republic» of everyone dominates in the shape of personal, portable deification. The ideological coordinates of this horizontal sense of the multitude may work to deny the impact of forces of contemporary capitalism (corporate power and oligarch networks), nonetheless the sense of a Democratis, still forms a regulatory ideal in which a state of radical contingency and flux remains an open question.

What can we do in this complex framework for ourselves?

How to live? Who and what to follow?

How to represent ourselves?

And secondly: what to expect from those who are tirelessly shaping « forms » and aestheticizing our framework of existence for us – the artists?

Domus Aurea: the event, the exhibition, this time in art space Æther, deals with everyone's reception, the reception of those « everyones » that we are: women, men, transgender people, wealthy, less wealthy, included, excluded, powerful, weak, informed, misinformed, politicized, depoliticized, enthusiastic, depressed... without discrimination. For this purpose, it puts all these « everyones » in contact with artistic experiences in vivo, as so many moments of life. The first quest of Domus Aurea would be: to find one's own body, to feel one's self, to unmask it, perhaps. To re-conceive desire.

Who could help us? Two Bulgarian artists, Simeon Simeonov and Voin de Voin. They offer us, through participatory sculpture in the case of Simeon, and through relational performances, in the case of Voin, material to test our bodies, to feel our weaknesses, or our resilience. The means differ, but in both cases for spectators' greater benefit it is their personal « golden house », which is requested, maybe vandalized, but certainly re-evaluated at the end. As Simeon Simeonov and Voin de Voin contemplate, contact with art elevates to a quasi-magical, shamanic dimension. Even if it can elicit non-translatable disturbance, it engages in an intense existential relationship that goes beyond merely contemplating the beautiful; it appeals to recovering one's affects, one's consciousness, one's way of inhabiting the « house » which is the body. « You've given me your body, o spectator, and I, the artist, I want to make it golden. »

Arriving at the present 2019

For the second edition we are proposing Sofia City to centralize the magnitude of voices and visions and establish the city as an Epicenter of art commodities, exhibitions, events, discussions and before all a meeting point for art practitioners to come together from different places in Europe and USA, and deliver a perspective on current political, social and artistic reproaches and movements emerging or already « flourishing » our world today.

PEOPLE, SPACES, INITIATIVES, ORGANIZATIONS

Æther, Sofia
Swimming Pool, Sofia
Soft Power Palace, Stuttgart
Vaska Emanouilova gallery, Sofia
Doma Art Foundation, Sofia
The Fridge – Independent art organization, Sofia
Ö - Space for art (Stefka Tsaneva), Sofia
Eugster gallery (Ana Dragic), Belgrade

Independent curators:

Zoya Petrova
Sandra Oehy
Laurel Ptak (Art In General , NY)

Speakers:

Despina Panagiotopoulou (GR)
Lea Vajova (BG)
Andrew Fremont-Smith (USA)

Great, But Late? : A Battlefield of Dialectics Between Form and Sensitivity.

Through line of affinities and moments of crisis, we invite cultural practitioners, theorists and artists to paradoxically sum up with a puzzle that might create sites of unpredictability. To perhaps question the controversial nature of form itself.

In times of overdetermined living (war zones, hidden and overtly banal political agendas, spiritual confusion and recourse to post-apocalyptic notions like fatalistic closure on the political question of global warming), freedom appears to be a precarious matter, in a perhaps new way we are barred from articulating.

Political agency itself is caught in a conundrum: What is it, if not an idea and yet controlled by outside forces?... Is it an individual horizon and in what way does it call for a group action?

This precarious freedom of the contemporary era, becomes an embodied way of perceiving reality, leaving the individual in a state of stasis, virtual limbo, anticipating a change, but rather creating a negative liminal space both in mental and physical spheres. The play and power of the past century and into the current social, economic and geo-political reality, have created a shift in the mind of the citizens, doubtless making the mark more visible of the split worlds – the privileged and the suffering.

The face of this era, has displayed itself with a new one the one of reoccurring past, unwanted and yet producing possible scenarios for society, that is trapped in totalitarian frames and under new age unspoken slavery.

The instability of the course of events are a sign of psycho-geographical displacement (technology, media, information), and plays an important part in the way we see the method of working in this edition of the **SAW**.

SAW – past tense of « seeing », « to see ».

SAW – a saw is a tool consisting of a tough blade, wire, or chain with a hard toothed edge. It is used to cut through material, very often wood though sometimes metal or stone. The cut is made by placing the toothed edge against the material and moving it forcefully forth and less forcefully back or continuously forward.

Combining the meaning of this abbreviation, almost like in a mathematic equation we arrive to this proposal – what do we need to witness in order to arrive or relate to the question of the Act...?

What do we need to lose/chop/cut/extract, in order to see through, and truly begin.

The dialectics between seeing and believing take on a new meaning for us to establish a common ground of discussion on the topic of form and sensitivity.

Which is the valid truth, the one that someone tells you, or the one that you experience by doing. We are looking for a new common language, which which we can build a foundation of stability in an unstable setting.

A wish to state not a phobic sensation of passivity and immobility, but rather to urge the desire of encounter and communicate to truly enter and also find a path to exit the void, physicalized in art's expanded studio.

To perhaps lose the binds of the infinite whip-appropriation of our modern nightmare.

What is beyond, to see through?